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POSSIBLE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ALTERNATIVE MILITARY POLICIES

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PREFACE

Several draft-versions of this paper were circulated among members of the Concept Group of the Kahn-Quade National Security Seminar; the objective was to facilitate discussion, hopefully improving for that purpose upon Kahn's proposed list of "alternative national postures" (see Appendix). This version was discussed at the third Concept Group meeting, 16 August 1960; see D-7810 for brief minutes.

I have benefited from critical comments by a very large number of the members of the seminar, in particular, R. Bristol, T. F. Burke, J. F. Digby, A. L. George, F. C. Ikle, H. Kahn, R. A. Levine, A. W. Marshall, H. S. Rowen, M. Rush, F. Sallagar, E. Quade.

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POSSIBLE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ALTERNATIVE MILITARY POLICIES

Daniel Ellsberg

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The trick is to make distinctions that will make a difference. I have not tried to generate all the logically possible alternative policies, but to include the elements under each alternative that actually tend to be critical: (a) in determining the preference of a given person between one position and another; (b) in distinguishing between significantly different sets of preferences. Only those constellations of critical factors have been listed which represent important, identifiable points of view in current national discussion.

The purpose of such a list is to facilitate debate, providing some standard reference positions and directing attention to the controversial issues.

The "policies" listed are not merely "postures," i.e., designations of hardware and force structure; they are also defined in terms of strategy, plans, certain arms control aims, declaratory policy, passive defense, and general strategic "philosophy" (described in brackets).

The policies represent goals to their adherents; their feasibility, in any given period, is not to be taken for granted. They might be urged as desirable goals even if their feasibility or effectiveness under all circumstances could not be guaranteed.

Inclusion of a given policy by no means indicates an endorsement of the "reasonableness" of its philosophy or details. Some common reasons for opposing a given policy:

"It is not feasible, in the period for which it is proposed";

"It would be too costly or ineffective compared to alternative policies for the same goal, or comparing its goal to other objectives";

"If achieved, its actual effect might be other than expected or desired (e.g., it might be provocative rather than deterrent; or might have undesirable effects on alliances, the progress of technology, or mutual arms policies; or might increase the likelihood of accidents, unauthorized action, unintended war, or Soviet aggression against third areas)";

"It might interfere with the attainment of other goals, e.g., arms control, national independence in third areas";

"The very attempt to achieve it might be provocative, or might have undesirable side effects (e.g., distracting attention from other problems and objectives, interfering with arms control aims, unbalancing budget)".

Hybrid policies might result from a desire for "insurance" against the infeasibility of a given policy or a later desired shift in policy; e.g., this might affect the size and nature of a "pre-attack mobilization base" which would facilitate achieving a given posture if it should later appear desirable. Moreover, certain "irrevocable" features of a chosen policy might be eschewed, so as not to prejudice the attainability of certain other policies if they should later appear preferable.

PEACE WITHOUT STRATEGIC DETERRENCE

(The following are only a sample of many possible goal-postures under this hypothetical objective, which is usually urged in terms of the costs and risks of an "uncontrolled arms race.")

a. Bilateral strategic nuclear disarmament; disengagement; bilateral limitations on limited war forces (or, if this is unattainable, larger limited war forces than present).

b. Unilateral (if bilateral unattainable) strategic nuclear disarmament; disengagement; larger limited war forces than present (possibly a nuclear deterrence force under UN control).

c. Unilateral strategic nuclear disarmament; militia-type local troops; tacit (or possibly declaratory) policy of passive resistance ("non-cooperation") to aggression; attempt to compromise major conflicts of interest through negotiation, increase in mutual understanding, unilateral and joint economic assistance programs.

d. Internal police force plus "world government."

STRATEGIC DETERRENCE OF NUCLEAR ATTACK ON THE UNITED STATES

I. DETERRENCE ONLY

a. "Facade"

[Rely for deterrence on enemy uncertainty of consequences of his attack; conserve resources to further other objectives.]

Large but not invulnerable retaliatory force, with some chance of survival in part;

For parts that survive, some likelihood of automatic retaliation against population targets;

No significant active or passive defenses or survivable post-attack control (hence, little ability to limit damage or win desirable military outcome in either first or second strike).

b. Minimum deterrence

[Rely for deterrence on enemy certainty of a limited strategic retaliation, limited in size.]

Small retaliatory force with high chance of survival;

Command/control structure giving high likelihood of automatic retaliation against cities;

No significant active or passive defense, or control capability that survives beyond initial "Go" order.

Declaratory policy: US will not strike first.

c. Maximum retaliation

Same as above (b), but large retaliatory force with automatic response, guaranteeing destruction of 60-90 per cent of enemy population (attacks are likely to be lethal on both sides, since no US attempt to achieve effective active or passive defense or counterforce capability).

d. Stable mutual deterrence

[Reduce likelihood that "strategic balance" (unwillingness of either side to launch an all-out nuclear strike) will be

upset by changes in the situation: either by changes in the calculations of either side of the advantages of a first strike (premeditated or pre-emptive) or by "shocks" to equilibrium such as a nuclear accident, an unauthorized action, or false warning of attack.

Hence, take both unilateral and (if possible) bilateral action to reduce the premium on striking first and on fast response for both sides. This should not only reduce the likelihood (and fear) of a premeditated attack on either side, but should lessen the destabilizing effect of the above "shocks." Next, take unilateral and bilateral action to lessen the likelihood of occurrence of such "shocks."]

Large retaliatory force (or small, with bilateral limits on strategic forces) with high likelihood of survival;

Survival not dependent on fast reaction to warning;

Command/control structure assuring full information on nature and origin of attack, and capable of a considered, delayed response; (not necessarily so total as above: [c]);

Response delays built-in and known to enemy, if possible;

Abandonment of any highly vulnerable offensive forces and forces requiring fast reaction;

Encouragement, aid, advice and agreements given to enemy to reduce the vulnerability and dependence on fast reaction of his forces and command systems (in principle, willingness to provide enemy with Polaris submarines, if necessary);

No forces tailored to exploit vulnerabilities of enemy forces;

No significant active or passive defenses;

No plans for US first strike;

Declaratory policy: US will not strike first;

Capability for bolstering invulnerable, slow-response retaliatory forces during a crisis; with alert procedures designed to minimize risk that their intent will be mistaken by enemy;

Efforts to assure positive control, reduce chance of accidents or unauthorized action on both sides;

Plans and capabilities for "stabilizing" a crisis by demonstrating capabilities, reassuring enemy as to intentions, negotiating;

Plans and information/communication/inspection capabilities for containing a mutually-unintended war that does break out (e.g., by accident, false alarm, unauthorized action, nth country action);

Insofar as they might contribute to (not conflict with) stability, elements of the "controlled retaliation" policy described below under the objectives, "Stable Deterrence and Improved War Outcome";

Limited war forces designed to aid stability not only by deterring limited aggression but by containing it if it does occur at a low level of violence; larger than present forces, with mobility for very prompt reaction, and major HE capability for meeting non-nuclear attack; "disengagement" or maximum engagement, whichever seems more likely to prevent the outbreak of conflict and/or to contain it.

II. STABLE DETERRENCE AND IMPROVED WAR OUTCOME IF DETERRENCE FAILS

a. Controlled retaliation

[Without major compromise of deterrence or stability, aim at limiting damage and ending war acceptably (not at improving military outcome) by graduated threat of strategic retaliation.]

DE

Stable Deterrence policy but with:

Command/control structure capable of delayed, flexible, selective, sequential responses, including demonstrations, and limited retaliation;

Plans for implementing intra-war threat-strategies, to influence enemy tactics, end war and obtain acceptable terms, by communication with enemy, demonstrations, selective retaliation and appropriate demands;

Passive defenses; limited fallout shelters and base relocation away from cities (to separate military from civil targets).

b. Controlled war-fighting

WWK

[Aim not only at limiting damage and ending war acceptably but also at improving military outcome: avoiding military defeat, achieving stalemate or, preferably, military victory, where these terms refer to the residual, post-attack balance of military capabilities and the resulting capabilities to threaten, bargain and influence war-ending terms and postwar power relationships. Possibly some compromise of deterrence and stability, but strains on these to be counteracted so far as possible, e.g., by larger survivable retaliatory force and the arms control measures mentioned; no measures to be taken, in terms of type or extent, which threaten seriously to jeopardize deterrence or stability, particularly if their

effectiveness in improving outcome seems highly doubtful.)

Attempt to avoid provoking all-out arms race, possibly by restraining levels of forces and defenses below levels otherwise desirable.

Make no attempt to achieve high-confidence capability to limit damage or win military victory under all strike-second circumstances (i.e., all Soviet offensive/defensive postures and tactics, all circumstances of war-initiation); aim merely at capability that will improve outcome under many circumstances, though it may do very well or very poorly under particular conditions.

Be willing to "pay more" to avoid visibly increasing first-strike, as distinct from second-strike, capability to improve war outcome (though no attempt to reduce first-strike capabilities not likely to be apparent to Soviets, or not otherwise unstabilizing).]

Large retaliatory force with high likelihood of survival;

Mixed force of varied capabilities, including some large-yield and some high-precision weapons;

Enlarged reconnaissance and surveillance program, both pre-war and post-attack;

Some forces capable of fast response, though preferably not dependent on this for survival;

Highly survivable command and control system, capable of both fast and delayed flexible responses with monitoring and feed-back control of operations, capable of processing intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance and status data both pre-war and post-attack and conducting limited or all-out counterforce operations as well as demonstrations, limited retaliation, and intra-war negotiation;

Plan no all-out attacks on cities; limited city attacks only if necessary to implement threat-strategies; announce this concept;

Bilateral and unilateral measures to decrease chance on both sides of accidents, unauthorized action or false alarms (e.g., decrease Soviet reliance upon fast reaction to ambiguous warning);

But otherwise no special efforts to induce Soviets to reduce vulnerability of their forces; retain capability to discover and exploit these vulnerabilities;

Passive defenses: major fallout shelter program and base relocation away from cities.

Survivable bomber defenses to prevent Soviet free ride;

"Stabilizing" limited war forces, as defined under "Stable Deterrence."

NFU?

NFS?

STRATEGIC DETERRENCE AND THE DETERRENCE OF THIRD-AREA AGGRESSION AND "MAJOR PROVOCATIONS"

1. Large, mobile, flexible, US and allied limited war forces to deter and/or contain third-area aggression; in combination with any one of policies listed above for "Strategic Deterrence of Nuclear Attack on the US"; with "response in kind" plus mobilization threat to deter other "major provocations."

   a. Major non-nuclear capability, with tactical nuclear back-up capability to deter enemy from using nuclear weapons (possibly with threats of limited strategic retaliation as further back-up deterrent).

   b. Major reliance on tactical nuclear weapons, with threats of limited strategic retaliation (or of possible escalation to all-out nuclear war) to keep nuclear war limited.

   c. Separate theater policies, with primary reliance upon (a) in some theaters, (b) in others, special policies (e.g., guerrilla forces) in others.

2. Limited strategic threats to deter third-area aggression; any one of strategic deterrence policies, except "Stable Deterrence."

   a. Independent nuclear deterrence forces possessed by individual countries, or by regional alliances (e.g., NATO), threatening either limited strategic retaliation for specified enemy actions, or "all-out" national retaliation for major aggressions (presumably on a scale much smaller than the US is capable of threatening).

   b. Limited strategic retaliation policy by US. "Controlled retaliation posture plus:

      Declaratory policy that US may initiate controlled city retaliation under certain "provocative" conditions, or in response to specified enemy actions;

      Plans and machinery capable of making limited retaliation, during a crisis period, fast and highly automatic in response to given enemy actions;

      Major evacuation capability;

      Present or smaller limited war forces.

3. All-out strategic threats to deter third-area aggression possibly with or possibly without the aid of other policies above, with strategic deterrence posture as indicated below:

a. First-Strike Commitment

"Facade" or "maximum retaliation" forces plus:

Declaratory policy of striking first with all-out nuclear attack under specified "provocative" conditions (e.g., a major Soviet attack on NATO);

Plans and machinery to launch massive "obliteration" attack under those or some of those conditions, response being fast and highly automatic (without reference to its "rationality" under those conditions);

Present or smaller limited war forces.

b. Ambiguous US First-Strike Policy

"Not-incredible FS Cap"

Brown? (WWK) Weinberger

[Attempt to restrain Soviet behavior by creating and exploiting some uncertainty as to US intentions; take measures to support appearance that a US first-strike might not be "wildly irrational" given certain provocations.]

Controlled war-fighting policy but:

Such assurance was not included above — but could (should) be.

Absence of assurance that US will not launch first strike, or possibly declaratory policy that it may, under "sufficient" but unspecified provocation;

Limited efforts to improve first-strike as distinct from second-strike capability to limit damage and improve military outcome (as opposed to "stabilizing" policies which would lessen first-strike capability);

Preemptive

Plan for and announce first-strike concept of strict military targeting coupled with threat-strategies.

c. A Credibly Rational First-Strike Capability

Non-preemptive? Preemptive

Weinberger

First-strike capability which makes a US first strike appear rational given specified major "provocations" (e.g., all-out attack on NATO; major ultimatum to NATO; limited attack on US or NATO forces).

Aim at medium-to-high confidence capability to limit damage markedly (5-60 million US casualties) and achieve military victory in a US first strike despite possible determined efforts by Soviets to counter these objectives; this may imply a much larger effort and military budget than required

for "controlled war-fighting capability" for strategic deterrence alone;

Increase all forces required for controlled war-fighting to levels required for above objectives;

Major civil defense program, including large fall-out shelter program, blast shelters, stockpiling, evacuation capability;

(CM) Add vulnerable and slow-reacting offensive forces (especially if significantly cheaper; but even if not, to strengthen credibility);

Major effort to achieve AICBM capability;

Add major active defenses, including ground and satellite AICBM's, to extent of feasibility;

Plan and announce concept of strict military targeting combined with evacuation and threat-strategies;

Mitigate undesirable effects upon deterrence (e.g., by increasing invulnerable retaliatory forces), stability, and arms race so far as possible, but accept such costs as are unavoidable to assure rationality of first strike;

Deter "lesser" provocations by limited war forces or limited strategic threats.

d. All-Purpose First-Strike Threat

Above (c), but:

Aim at capability making US first-strike appear rational given even "minor" provocations (e.g., threatening maneuvers or changes in posture, limited attacks in peripheral areas), and guaranteeing military victory even when striking second;

Smaller limited war forces than present.

Appendix

HERMAN KAHN'S LIST OF POSTURES

Chart 1: Alternative National Postures

1. Internal police force plus "world government"
2. Minimum Deterrence plus Limited War plus Arms Control
3. Add insurance to the Minimum Deterrent:
   a. for reliability (Finite Deterrence)
   b. against unreliability (Counterforce as Insurance)
   c. against a change in policy (Preattack Mobilization Base)
4. Add Credible First-Strike Capability
5. "Splendid" First-Strike and no Limited War Capability
6. Dreams